

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS**

Please amend Claims 1, 3, and 6 as follows, without prejudice or disclaimer to continued examination on the merits:

1. (Currently Amended): A method for intelligent packet forwarding over a network, comprising:

providing a virtual ports comprising a grouping of one or more STS-1s allocated to a ~~particular~~ source client and a destination client and an amount of bandwidth associated with the grouping;

assigning the grouping to a ~~predetermined~~ data flow path from a source port of the source client to a destination port of the destination client, ~~the predetermination made expressly for the grouping wherein the assigning of the grouping is done through one of a network management system connected to the source client and the destination client and directly through the source client and the destination client; and~~

establishing the ~~predetermined~~ data flow path for the grouping from the source port to the destination port, wherein the data flow path is established from a first virtual port at the source port to a second virtual port at the destination port; and

wherein the routing in the network of the grouping of one or more STS-1s is independent of the virtual ports.

2. (Previously Presented): A method according to claim 1, further comprising notifying each of said source port and destination port of said data flow path, and providing to said source port an address identifying said destination port and providing to said destination port an address identifying said source port.

3. (Currently Amended): An apparatus for intelligent packet forwarding over a network, ~~said apparatus~~ comprising:

a grouping device that provides a virtual ports comprising a grouping of one or more STS-1s allocated to a particular source client and a destination client and an amount of bandwidth associated with the grouping;

an assignment device that assigns the grouping to a predetermined data flow path from a source port of the source client to a destination port of the destination client, the predetermination made expressly for the grouping wherein the assignment device assigns the grouping through one of a network management system connected to the source client and the destination client and directly through the source client and the destination client;  
and

forwarding rules a path identifier for transporting identifying data on a data flow path extending from said source port to said destination port and notifying each of said ports of said data flow path, wherein the data flow path is established from a first virtual port at the source port to a second virtual port at the destination port; and

wherein the routing in the network of the grouping of one or more STS-1s is independent of the virtual ports.

4. (Previously Presented): The method according to claim 1 wherein the network is a SONET network.

5. (Canceled)

6. (Currently Amended): The method according to claim 1, wherein the grouping of one or more STS-1s is designated by connected to a network access device.

7. (Previously Presented): The apparatus according to claim 3, further comprising an address identifier for identifying and providing to said source port an address identifying said destination port and for identifying and providing to said destination port an address identifying said source port.

8. (Previously Presented): The apparatus according to claim 3, wherein the network is a SONET network.

9. (Canceled)